

## *Land Use and Growth Management Profile*

**L**ackawanna County was founded in 1878 from a portion of Luzerne County territory. Located in the heart of Pennsylvania’s anthracite coal region, it takes its name from the river that traverses its countryside. The County’s largest waterway, the Lackawanna River flows from its mouth near Forest City, PA, in a southwesterly direction through the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton/Hazleton metropolitan area. It finally merges with the North Branch Susquehanna River in Pittston City, Luzerne County. In American Indian, the Lackawanna River means, “a place where two streams meet.” In the County’s early years, the river was the lifeblood of the region, providing power to fuel sawmill production and to transport lumber to market. Today, the County remains a crossroads community. Interstates 81, 84, 476, and 380 all converge in the Scranton area, making the Lackawanna Valley quite accessible to a variety of cultural attractions throughout the Pocono Region.

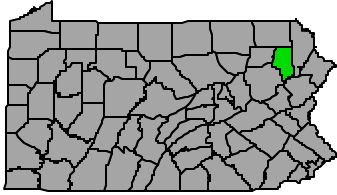
Lackawanna County is 459 square miles in land area and has the distinction of being the *last* county established in Pennsylvania. According to the 2000 Census, the County’s population has declined 2.6 percent since 1990. With 213,295 persons, it is currently ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in population. Lackawanna is home to 40 municipalities – two cities (Scranton and Carbondale), 17 boroughs, and 21 townships. The City of Scranton is the county seat and largest central city, representing 36 percent of the County’s total population.

### **Existing Land Use Conditions**

In the 1700s, the relatively flat topography and good agricultural soils of the Lackawanna River Valley attracted settlement to the region. Today, development remains concentrated in the Valley, but is also spreading along the I-81 and I-380 corridors. Although development is popping up in rural townships, open space still comprises the largest land use in the County. Forestland covers 60 percent of the County’s total land area. The second largest land use is farmland, which covers approximately 19 percent of the total land cover. The remaining acreage in Lackawanna County is mostly comprised of abandoned mine lands and urban development.

### **Key Land Use Issues**

- ☑ **Lackawanna County’s declining population is consuming more land.** Although the County’s population has been on the decline for the last 40 years, this decline has been felt most markedly in the County’s two central cities. In contrast, some townships – particularly those in the northern and southern portion of the County – have exhibited marked population growth. According to the U.S. Census, the number of housing units in Lackawanna County increased by nearly 4 percent from 1990-2000. Over the same period, the County experienced a 2.6 percent population loss. This trend indicates that the County’s population is consuming more acreage per person and that more land



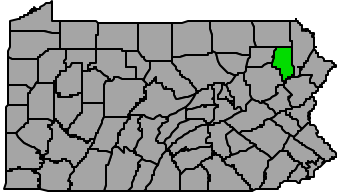
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is being consumed outside the metropolitan area.

- ☑ **Abandoned mine lands are degrading water quality throughout the Lackawanna Valley.** Since the discovery of coal in the 1820s, the Lackawanna Valley has been mined extensively. Although mining activity ceased years ago, remnants of the County’s industrial heritage dot the landscape in the form of abandoned mine lands (AMLs). Within the Lackawanna River watershed, many streams are losing water to the underground mines, which are forming a huge pool known as the Northern Anthracite Mine Pool. When this water reaches the earth’s surface, it mixes with oxygen and precipitates on the streambeds as “yellow boy.” This high concentration of metallic compounds has degraded the aquatic environment, particularly in the lower reaches of the Lackawanna River – a three-mile stretch from Scranton to Pittston.
- ☑ **Out-migration of the County’s population is contributing to increased storm water runoff, which in turn exacerbates flooding in the river valley.** Scattered development, both residential and commercial, is occurring in the hillside areas of the Lackawanna River Valley. This growth in impervious surface coverage increases storm water run-off and the frequency of flood events. For a river already subject to periodic flooding, uncontrolled development has the potential to

worsen flood losses in the Lackawanna Valley.

- ☑ **Completion of the Lackawanna Valley Industrial Highway has encouraged the reclamation of abandoned mine lands (AMLs) and has spurred private business investment in Lackawanna County.** First conceived in the 1960s, the Lackawanna Valley Industrial Highway is a 16-mile, four-lane limited access highway that connects Interstates 81, 84, and 380 in Dunmore to U.S. Route 6 outside Carbondale. This high-priority PennDOT project was designed to reduce traffic congestion on Route 6 and to provide the northeastern region of Pennsylvania with direct access to the Interstate highway system. Since the project was completed in 1999, the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce began construction of the Valley View Business Park, a 1,000-acre park situated at the Jessup interchange on Route 247. Named after Governor Robert P. Casey, the highway has opened up large areas of Lackawanna and Wayne Counties for development. The project has encouraged economic development within the County’s established growth corridor and has averted development of the County’s ridgetop ecosystems, such as the Moosic Mountain Barrens.



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### **Land Use Planning Activities**

- ☑ **The Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC) has prepared model zoning regulations to facilitate implementation of a regional land use plan.** After completing a draft land use plan in 1995, the Planning Commission developed model land use regulations designed to preserve steep slopes and critical natural areas. The hope is that municipalities throughout the Lackawanna Valley will update their zoning regulations to achieve consistency with the regional land use plan, which promotes a more compact development pattern.
- ☑ **The County has participated in a regional open space plan.** In cooperation with Luzerne County, Lackawanna County recently completed a bi-county Open Space, Greenways & Outdoor Recreation Plan to guide preservation of the region's valuable natural resource areas.
- ☑ **In 1991, the LCRPC prepared a stormwater management plan for the Lackawanna River watershed.** The watershed involves 50 municipalities and parts of four counties. A model stormwater management ordinance was also prepared and adopted by 48 of the communities to control stormwater runoff from new development. The LCRPC is in the process of updating the plan ordinances to incorporate water quality discharge standards.